

Arlington Heights, Ill. – U.S. Representative Mark Kirk called for Congress to pass legislation granting patients the right to see data on in-house infections caused by hospital stays. Health care-associated infections often result from improper sanitation techniques at hospitals, such as failure to wash hands or incomplete instrument sterilization. The Healthy Hospitals Act (H.R. 1174) would create a Department of Health and Human Services database on hospital infections. The bill also would create financial incentives for hospitals that reduce the rate of in-house infections.

“According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 1.7 million patients contract infections in a hospital, costing nearly 100,000 Americans their lives each year,” Congressman Kirk said. “Patients have the right to know how their hospital compares to others in preventing in-house infections. The Healthy Hospitals Act gives patients the information they need to seek care in the safest hospital of their community.”

The four primary categories for health care-associated infections are:

- Urinary tract infections - 32 percent
- Surgical site infections - 22 percent
- Pneumonia - 15 percent
- Bloodstream infections (i.e. MRSA) – 14 percent

These infections cost patients and Medicare an additional \$5 billion annually due to extended stays and additional treatment. Serious infections resulting from surgery on average add \$57,000 to a patient’s hospital charges.

Congressman Kirk was joined by Bruce Crowther, the president of Arlington Heights-based Northwest Community Hospital. The hospital was the first medical institution in the Chicago area to publish patient care information online, including hospital-acquired blood stream and surgical infections. The industry-leading hospital also releases data regarding patient safety and satisfaction, as well as other performance indicators, on its Web site at www.nch.org/metrics/.

According to the nonprofit Consumers Union, 21 states, including Illinois, enacted legislation

requiring the reporting of infection rates. While Illinois was one of the first states to approve a Hospital Report Card law in 2003, the Illinois Department of Public Health has yet to publish information on infections. State officials estimate the delays will continue until at least the end of 2008.

“Four years ago, Illinois was leading the fight to reduce hospital-acquired infections,” Congressman Kirk said. “But due to a lack of commitment and leadership, Illinois families still do not have access to this vital information. Pennsylvania patients have these rights. It is not clear why our governor has not made implementing this law a priority. If the state will not act to protect families, the Congress should.”

At least seven other states already published report cards, including Colorado, Florida, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services currently publishes information regarding heart failure, pneumonia and surgical care, but there is no national database regarding the prevalence of health care-associated infections.

The text of the bill is available [here](#) .